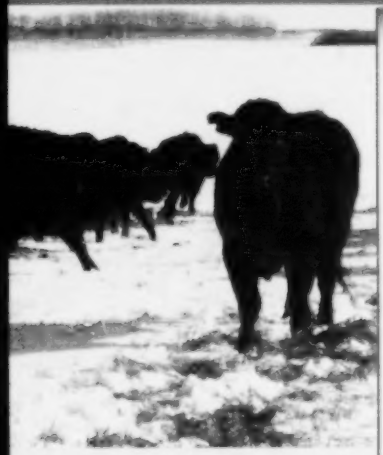
The North West
GRAZING NEWS
A PART OF THE NORTH WEST ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROJECT



The Snow Factor

by Jeremy Brown, PAg
Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

Many cattle producers on the Canadian Prairies have been moving to more extensive-type winter feeding of their cows. The advantages to these types of systems include reduced costs and labour, improved manure management, and reduced infrastructure needs. Some of the more common methods of winter grazing include stockpiled perennial forages, cereal swathgrazing, corn, and bale grazing.

One of the commonly talked about challenges to these systems is the potential for snow to act as a barrier under certain conditions. Indeed, winter arrived earlier and stayed longer in 2006-2007 than in many recent years. Many areas in north west Saskatchewan received large amounts of snow accompanied by winds, resulting in hard drifts. There were reports of producers abandoning their winter grazing strategies because the snow was "too deep and hard."

Is this proof that winter grazing doesn't work in some areas, or is very high risk? Maybe not, as a few producers were pleasantly surprised to find that their cows managed to graze through these difficult snow conditions.

Archie Kwasnuik operates north west of Meadow Lake. This is his fifth winter using barley swathgrazing.

"Last winter was really hard going," says Archie. "We had a good two feet of snow and lots of wind. The snow was over my knees, and I was able to walk on top of most of it."

Kwasnuik found that under these snow conditions, the cows acted differently. Rather than spreading out quickly and opening up all the available swaths, the herd tended to stay together and use each others' trails both to walk in and to give them access to the swaths. He also found that he had to move the cows faster than usual, as the cows weren't able to get to the entire swath in some areas. But the cows held their condition, and were still able to access snow as a water source, since under the hard snow there was softer powder.

Grazing management is especially crucial in tougher conditions. Kwasnuik moved his fence every three days, so the cattle continually had access to fresh swaths. Had the snow blown into swaths that the cows had already opened up, they would have been inaccessible.

"Our utilization was lower, but we were able to put the cows back out after calving and they cleaned up what they had missed," says Kwasnuik. "We now realize just how capable these cows really are. You just need to keep them out there and keep an eye on them."

Harry and Dave Kerr ranch near Lashburn. In 2007, their cows swathgrazed right up until calving started. They managed to forage for most of the swaths, with the exception of the low spots in the field where the snow blew in deeper. Like Kwasnuik, they also turned the cow/calf pairs back out in the spring to get what was left.

"When they were done, the swaths were cleaned up as good as ever," says Dave.

It seems that in some cases, bad weather is less of a barrier than one might think. When the going gets tough, consider giving your cows a chance!

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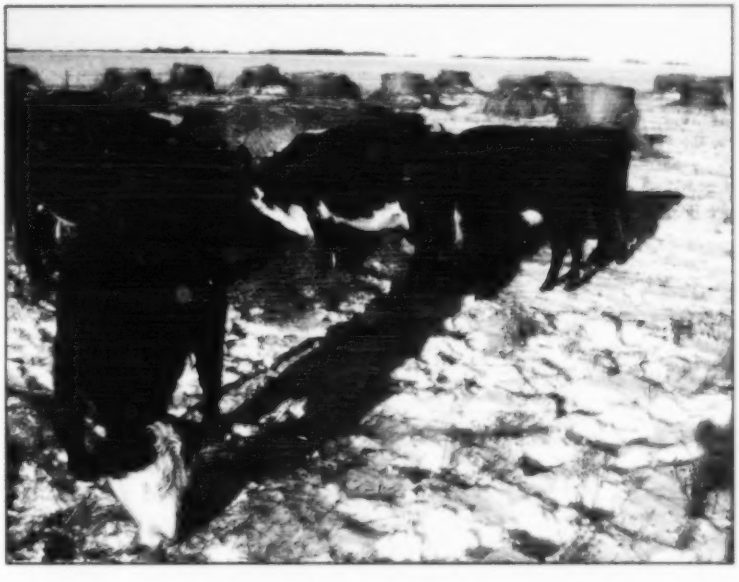
The ABC's of Bale Grazing

By Lorne Klein, PAg & Al Foster, PAg
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture

Bale grazing is simply feeding hay and straw bales extensively on pasture, hayland or cropland in the winter instead of feeding in corrals. Bale grazing increases soil fertility where the bales are fed and will reduce corral cleanout costs. It also has the potential to reduce fuel and machinery expenses.

Most often bales are placed on seeded pastures or left in the hay fields where they were made. After bale grazing, even with good livestock control and feed clean-up, there will likely be a mat of soiled and left over material. If bales are placed on annual cropland, this layer would probably be difficult to seed through the following spring. Where residue is a problem the area may need to be harrowed in early spring.



Most often bales are placed on their round side, the same as when ejected from the baler. This way the bales stay relatively intact after the twines are removed. Livestock are usually limited to a three to four day feed supply to minimize wasting. An electric fence is used to limit the number of bales cattle can access. With changes in temperature, the feed cleanup should be monitored and fences moved accordingly.

The preferred seeded perennial fields for bale grazing will have at least one rhizomatous grass such as smooth brome, quackgrass, or Kentucky bluegrass. If a relatively thick layer of material is left behind after grazing, these grasses have a greater chance of growing through and filling in again. Native prairie is normally not the preferred location for bale grazing because this may result in the invasion of tame forage and weed species.

Ideally the best location for bale grazing is a site that is easy to monitor, at or near where the bales were made, and fenced with a water source. Snow can be used as a water source once a sufficient amount has fallen. The site should also provide protection from wind and have power and a handling facility close if needed. Solar powered fences are an option where power is not available.

Bales can be placed during summer, fall, or winter. Some producers prefer to have bales in place prior to freezing weather, especially when they intend to remove the plastic twine prior to freezing rain or wet snow in fall. In cases where sisal twine is used, it may be left on the bale to rot in the field after grazing.

Some producers have placed the entire winter supply of bales in the field prior to winter. Where there is a concern of deep snow limiting cattle access to feed, bales can be placed weekly or monthly throughout the winter. By doing this some of the cost advantage is lost because bales will be handled an extra time, but it may reduce the risk when bad weather hits.

On parcels of land with variable soil conditions and/or rolling topography, producers may want to place bales on areas where the nutrients from manure and left over litter from the bales will provide the greatest benefit. One example would be placing bales on hill tops where there is lower fertility and shallow topsoil.

Using alfalfa/grass hay bales averaging 1,300 lbs, research is suggesting a bale density of 25 bales per acre. To get this density, place bales in a grid on 40 foot centres. At this rate, about 75 lbs per acre of nitrogen will accumulate in the soil profile the following spring. This is considered a safe and recommended rate for fertilizer application.

2008-05157

Agri-Environmental Group Plan Sees Projects Aplenty

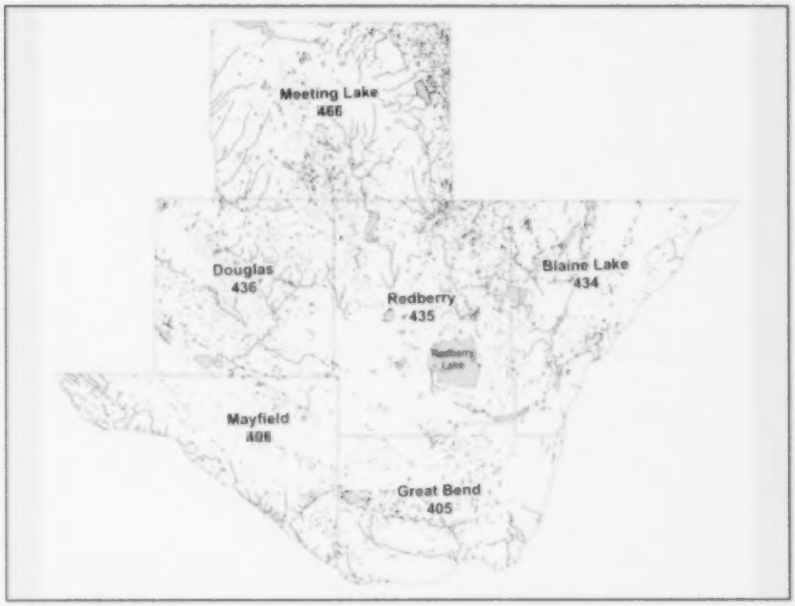
By John Kindrachuk
Redberry Lake Watershed
Agri-Environmental Group Plan

The Redberry Lake Watershed Agri-Environmental Group Plan is an example of how local producers can work together to improve their operations and the state of their watershed. Over the last year, nearly $800,000 has been delivered to producers in six rural municipalities to implement Beneficial Management Practices.

The Agri-Environmental Group Plan process is similar to an individual completing an Environmental Farm Plan. In the case of the group plan, producers within a certain geographic area choose a few Beneficial Management Practices that they feel would most benefit their local environment. They can then get help from a local technician to plan projects and apply for funding from the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program using the group certificate.

The two Beneficial Management Practices chosen by producers in the Redberry Lake Watershed were Wintering Site Management and Riparian Area Management. These Beneficial Management Practices were selected because they help reduce the risk to our water resources and also enhance the producer's bottom line.

If we want clean ground and surface water for future generations, we have to protect them now. When our grandfathers and fathers set up their cattle operations in the past they did so in a practical way, using whatever resources were available and not necessarily thinking about how it affected the environment. Wintering sites, for instance, were set up where the trees were to provide shelter for their livestock. The sites that had the tree growth were where the water was, along the creeks and sloughs. Today, we all know in the back of our minds that this is not good and that we have to ensure that we are taking care of the land.



There are many benefits for producers involved in the group planning process. They get the benefit of having someone come to their yard and help them plan their projects and submit the applications. There are also field days and seminars to help producers learn about the changes that could be made on their farms.

Producers are learning that there are alternative ways to manage their livestock operations that benefit the environment and also their bottom line. Perhaps your local area could benefit from an Agri-Environmental Group Plan in the near future.

PROJECTS BY TYPE

	Scope of Project	No. of Projects
Fencing	280 miles	115
Water projects		34
Portable wind breaks	427 units	60
Portable calf shelters	63 units	22
Field access		3
Buffer strip seeding	303 acres	5
Shelterbelt planting	1 mile	1

SUMMARY OF PROJECTS BY MUNICIPALITY

Rural Municipality	Number of Producers	Number of Projects	Total Project	Funding for Producers
RM of Douglas No. 436	8	15	$ 135,789.24	$ 67,894.62
RM of Redberry No. 435	27	62	$ 449,811.49	$ 224,905.75
RM of Blaine Lake No. 434	10	19	$ 260,158.89	$ 130,079.45
RM of Meeting Lake No. 466	15	27	$ 241,781.21	$ 120,890.61
RM of Mayfield No. 406	5	5	$ 49,200.00	$ 24,600.00
RM of Great Bend No. 405	21	34	$ 450,827.62	$ 225,413.81
TOTALS	**86**	**162**	**$ 1,587,568.45**	**$ 793,784.23**

Wrapping Up the North West Environmental Stewardship Project

by Jeremy Brown, PAg
Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

This will be the final edition of the North West Grazing News as part of the four-year funding agreement with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Greencover Canada Program, which finishes in March 2008.

It's hard to believe that four years has nearly come and gone. It has truly been a pleasure to work with so many great people to share information on agri-environmental issues in north west Saskatchewan. Thank you to all the producers, clubs, partners, and co-operators that have shared in making this project a success.

To date since April 2004, we have made over 320 on-farm/ranch consultations, hosted and co-hosted 26 field days/ workshops, and presented information to over 1,500 people. I have especially appreciated working with the many grazing clubs in the area which are bringing producers together to learn from one another.

This is not a farewell. I look forward to continuing to work for you in the future, and we will continue to publish this newsletter if funding can be secured. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and its partners are committed to this need for information. Producers are continually embracing change in order to stay viable. I truly appreciate all that I have learned from each of you, and enjoy the opportunity to take that knowledge to our peers.

Please continue to let us know how we can be helpful to you. All the best for the 2008 grazing season!

Jeremy

UPCOMING EVENT

Saskatchewan Pasture School

June 18 & 19, 2008
Saskatoon, SK

Contact: Saskatchewan Forage Council
(306) 966-2148
www.saskforage.ca

The North West Environmental Stewardship Project participating partners:

Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada

Western Applied Research Corporation

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture

Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association

Ducks Unlimited Canada

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